

'Your Postal Podcast' 72nd Edition Transcript – May 2014

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Richard Watkins: Welcome to *Your Postal Podcast*. This is Richard Watkins of U.S. Postal Service Corporate Communications. In this month's edition, we'll highlight a few Postal Heroes who make their communities safer and all of us a little prouder. We'll also take you to one of the most rural communities in the United States – a place 100 miles away from the nearest town.

Postal Superheroes to the Rescue Segment

Watkins: Since the annals of time, humans have gravitated toward the brave and the heroic. From Greek gods to generals in the field to comic book fantasy, we've looked up to those who set examples of leadership, honor, and duty.

The Postal Service is filled with individuals just like this. Lisa Nystuen highlights just a few of the Superheroes in our midst.

Lisa Nystuen: The release of the new Spider-Man movie and the collaboration between the Postal Service and Marvel has cast new attention on both fictional superheroes and the real-life superheroes who work among us every day.

Like Joseph Urbina, a Queens, New York, letter carrier who saw smoke from a fourth-floor window and bounded up the stairs to help warn the family. He then scrambled to all 24 apartment doors.

Joseph Urbina: So I went from apartment to apartment. And I just said, "Please, you have to leave, because there's a raging fire in the building. You have no time to pick up anything. You just have to leave right now," I told them. I went from fourth floor, to the third, to the second, first floor, all the way down, rang the bells, did everything I could.

And people, because they know me, these people are like my extended family. They know when I'm serious and when I'm not. So they just grabbed whatever they could. Everyone got out of the apartment within like three minutes, tops.

Nystuen: He ushered everyone to the common area of an adjacent building.

Urbina: And then the firemen came, and they asked me who is in the building. I said I just evacuated the whole building.

Nystuen: But the day wasn't done for Joseph.

Urbina: So I saw that the fire was in good hands. I kept working. I looked at my watch and I says, "Oh my God, I gotta get my job done." I finished my part of the route and I went and continued and I just went back to the station.

Nystuen: Like a true superhero, Urbina folded his cape, loaded his satchel, and told no one. It wasn't until residents came to the Post Office that the word of his deed got out.

Urbina: It's just the human thing to do to help your fellow human being.

Nystuen: On National Superhero Day last month, Urbina was recognized by the Postal Service in front of his peers.

Urbina: They gave me an award – which I am very grateful – but my biggest reward was the next day when I went to the lobby and they had this beautiful thank you card and they all signed it and they presented it to me – but this was a People’s award. But the hugs and the kisses that they gave me and the gratitude was more than enough for me. You know, I didn’t expect anything else.

Nystuen: Joseph has been on the same route for his entire career – more than 27 years. And he’s not leaving anytime soon.

Urbina: There’s other easier routes to go to, but I cannot leave my people. They’re just too nice.

Nystuen: Another superhero was Tasha Ewing. This Aurora, Colorado, letter carrier has less than 90 days in a postal uniform. But that didn’t stop her from doing the right thing and reporting a crime. She saw some young teen boys coming from a house that wasn’t theirs and called police from her cell phone. We caught up with her on her route.

Tasha Ewing: Most people I see are elderly people. So that’s why I thought it was weird when I seen a younger crowd coming out of the area. It just looked suspicious to me. If that happened to my house, I would want somebody to call.

Nystuen: From the same Aurora Station, Letter Carrier Danny Chavis helped save a man’s life. The mail was stacking up and Chavis knew something wasn’t right

Danny Chavis: This gentleman hadn’t picked his mail up and that’s very uncommon for him. I have been his mailman for like 11 years and he’s never done that.

Nystuen: He checked with the neighbors and one of them had a phone number for a family member. After a phone call, the family member came over and found the man in the home incapacitated from a stroke. He was rushed to a hospital, but unfortunately passed away a few weeks later. But the family was still grateful. They told the station manager, “Danny’s action gave us a chance to say goodbye.”

Chavis: I am the Postal Service. This is what they see every day. And I think they all do trust me. It’s all kind of overwhelming. They call it the “Postal Superhero Award.” Well, we’ve always been superheroes. (Laughs) They just now finally figured it out. I like that...”Letter Carrier Superhero”... Nah, I’ll stick with “Letter Carrier.” I like that one.

Mail in Rural America Segment

Watkins: Universal Service is a vital, yet often overlooked benefit of a healthy U.S. Postal Service. To illustrate the importance of mail to rural communities, David Rupert spoke to a few hardy residents of Jarbidge, Nevada, which you might say is “off the beaten path.”

David Rupert: You know you’re away from civilization when “going to town” means a hundred-mile one-way trip. For the folks in rural Jarbidge, Nevada, even in good weather, a trip to the grocery store, doctor or pharmacy is literally an all-day excursion, since nearly half those miles are on dirt roads.

Although Jarbidge is a quiet spot on the map in Northern Nevada, it isn't cut off from the world. You see, the community gets great three-day-a-week mail service, that comes through Salt Lake City and Jackpot, Nevada, delivered to a smattering of Contract Delivery boxes along the highway and a few Post Office Boxes.

Why do people, like 82-year-old Joan Hawker, live in such isolation?

Joan Hawker: Because we like it here. It's quiet. We don't have no crime. No drugs. And the air is clean.

Rupert: For customer like Hawker, access to USPS services helps her live a healthy life.

Hawker: I don't know what we'd do without the Post Office. Because all I have to do is call the pharmacy and they send me my medications I need. And it saves us a 200-mile round trip to go to town just to fill one prescription.

Rupert: There are remains of gold strikes from 100 years ago throughout the area, but don't call the settlement a "ghost town."

Hawker: Come live here a while and see if you think we're a bunch of ghosts.

Rupert: Nevada Magazine calls Jarbidge "delightfully isolated." The summer population of around 75 shrinks to about a dozen during the winter, thanks to the snow, cold and isolation.

Jolynn Young is even more isolated. She and her husband live at the Diamond A Ranch. Their mail is delivered to a rural box three miles down a dirt road from the ranch. And then it's another 10 miles to the town of Jarbidge. The winters are long, but the mail breaks the monotony and connects the small family to the outside world.

Jolynn Young: Yeah, all year round I love the mail (laughs). It's exciting, you know, to go. I have a baby, so a lot of times her grandparents mail her things. And, I don't know, it gives you something to – it perks you up, to go check the mail, I guess. It gives you something to do.

Rupert: For Young, it's her access to goods and services.

Young: Online shopping is big for us I guess because we live so far from town. But it's a good alternative to getting things that you can't find just in our town.

Rupert: The Youngs even run a mail order business from their isolated home.

Young: My husband braids rawhide so he has to mail reins and things that he makes out to the people who order them.

Rupert: Jeremy Slama has been visiting Jarbidge with his grandparents for decades. In 2012, he made the plunge and moved to the area. After two winters, he's earned the title: "full-time resident."

According to Slama, most of the residents who live there do so to get away from it all.

Jeremy Slama: But you still need communication with the outside world. You'd go crazy. Not everybody has the Internet up here. I still don't have it.

Rupert: And he depends on the Postal Service for his day-to-day sustenance.

Slama: Everything from groceries to books. It's vital. And without the mail it would be pretty hard going without having that in here.

Rupert: Postal Support Employee Mary Bess is the only USPS representative in a 100-mile radius. Her family has lived in the area for more than 90 years.

Mary Bess: Well, my family's been here since the early 1920s. My dad was Postmaster here. My mom was Postmaster here. And now, it's my turn. This place is in my blood.

News Roundup

Watkins: And now, here's a roundup of recent Postal Service news. The Postal Service ended the second quarter of its 2014 fiscal year with a net loss of \$1.9 billion. This marks the 20th of the last 22 quarters it has sustained a loss.

"The Postal Service is working diligently to improve its finances by streamlining our network to improve efficiency, reduce operating costs and increase revenue, which was up \$379 million over the same period last year — the third straight quarter of revenue increase," said Postmaster General and Chief Executive Officer Patrick Donahoe.

Quoting the PMG: "Despite aggressive cost-cutting actions, however, we will still incur annual inflationary cost increases of approximately \$1.2 billion each year, and First-Class Mail volume continues to decline."

The Postmaster General went on to assert that regardless of the state of the country's economy, without comprehensive legislative reform, the Postal Service will be unable to make the required \$5.7 billion retiree health benefit prefunding payment to the U.S. Treasury, due by Sept. 30th, 2014.

Thanks for listening to Your Postal Podcast. Now, we'd like to hear from you. Please email your feedback and story ideas to YourPostalPodcast@USPS.com.

One lucky listener who emails a comment about this month's podcast will be picked at random to receive a set of five First Day of Issue digital color postmark keepsake envelopes featuring the New England Coastal Lighthouses Forever Stamps, plus a full pane of 20 stamps. The winner will be selected from all qualifying comments emailed to YourPostalPodcast@usps.com by Monday, June 9th, 2014.

Our congratulations go out to Phyllis Fort of Gainesville, Florida, who emailed us a comment about the April podcast and has won an official program from the Austin, Texas, First Day of Issue Ceremony for the Jimi Hendrix Forever Stamp.

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